The Impacts of Poststructuralism, Psychoanalysis and Postmodernism on The Development of Autofiction

Authors

Ayda Önder[1]*

Affiliations

[1]Doctoral Program in English Language and Literature, Graduate School of Social Sciences Yeditepe University, Istanbul, 34755, Turkey.

*To whom correspondence should be addressed; E-mail: ayda.onder@std.yeditepe.edu.tr

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the ways in which poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and postmodernism have contributed to the development of autofiction. It is contended that the genre has a dialectical relationship with the twentieth century critical theories. Autofiction both affirms and questions the poststructuralist dismantling of the traditional perspectives on the concepts of authority, authenticity and truth by bringing the authorial presence back to the text but fictionalising it to some extent, committing to narrate the truth but creating an ambivalence around it. Autofiction engages with both the possibilities and limits of language in representing the referential world. Autofiction accepts that language fails to portray the reality truthfully; however, at the same time, it holds what language creates to be still connected to the reality of the author. Autofiction's contention of the possibility of truth depends heavily on psychoanalytic theories. It is observed that although autofiction assumes the subject to be fractured by the unconscious and denied access to the whole picture of the self's reality, little pieces of information that are recovered through psychoanalytic processes in autofictional narration provide truthful insights into selfhood and create opportunities to conceive subjective versions of reality. Finally, the postmodernist presumption of collapse of grand narratives is argued to have paved way to autofiction's preoccupation with subjective histories. As district from the postmodernist emphasis on irony, autofiction is considered as intending to provide a truthful representation of the referential by exploring multiple possibilities of the subject and embodied experience.

Keywords: Autofiction; deconstruction; postmodernism; poststructuralism; psychoanalysis

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary theoretical developments such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, deconstruction, poststructuralism, and postmodernism have substantially contributed to the development of theories and practice of autofiction. Autofiction has a dialectical relationship with these twentieth century critical theories, which have both laid the foundation for and come in conflict with autofictional mode of writing. In the preceding humanistic approach to literary criticism, the individual was held to be a unified, knowing, and autonomous entity. Authors were accordingly considered as being capable of articulating unproblematically truths about human nature or about the world in general. They were the unique source and origin of texts which conveyed their particular perceptions and individual insights (Belsey, 2002). However, the authorial authority which traditional criticism upheld has been put into question by the subsequent theorical advancements. As a result, the omniscience and self-confidence of autobiographical subject have progressively given way to the self-doubt and uncertainty of autofictional persona.

Grounded on the presumption of the post-Freudian subject as unstable, fragmented and shattered, modernist approach to literature has rejected conventional truths and figures of authority, and endorsed detachment of the author's personality from the text, undermining the authority of the autobiographical subject. Structuralist theory, problematising the traditional notion of intrinsic one-to-one correspondence between objects and referents, has maintained language not to reflect a pre-existent or external reality of objects. In this respect, neither objects nor referents possess essential meanings. Rather, meaning is generated symbolically through the signifying practices of language structured as a system of signs. Identically, for the poststructuralist theorists, language is not a transparent medium that can represent the world truthfully. Language is, in effect, utterly problematic. Contrary to the structuralist assumption, however, meaning does not reside in linguistic signs because relations between objects and referents are unstable, changing in every new context. Furthermore, language is capable of blending unintentional meanings and subconscious references into statements. This realisation of the fallibility of language has given rise to the conviction of imperfect nature of authorial power. If the language does not allow the author to communicate his/her intentions, then the author cannot be considered as having a hold on his/her enunciations (Jones, 2007). By simultaneously bringing the authorial presence back to texts but fictionalising it to some extent, and committing to narrate the truth but creating ambivalence around the concept of truth itself, authors of autofiction both affirm and question the poststructuralist dismantling of the traditional perspectives on the concepts of authority, authenticity and truth. They view

autofiction as exploring the extent to which language can represent the reality and the extent to which the process is distorted by impingement of such forces as memory, thought, feeling and mood. With the aim of contextualising autofiction within literary theory, the study will attempt to establish the ways in which contemporary critical thoughts have been influential on the development of autofiction.

RESULTS

Before the flourishment of structuralism in the 1960s, traditional criticism assumed that through writing, it would be possible to achieve self-discovery, self-knowledge and self-creation, which would reveal truths about 'a universal self'. Language was believed to be mimetic in the sense that it mimicked the outside world, giving a direct representation of reality. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916/1959) rejected the mimetic theory of language and drew attention to the composition of language as a system. He asserted that language is determined by its own internally structured rules. For that reason, language does not and cannot imitate reality, or designate objects or ideas through words. Words are not symbols that equal to things. They are simply signs constituted by two parts: the signifier (a written or spoken mark) and the signified (a concept in our minds). Meaning is produced by the relationship between the signifier and the signified, which is arbitrary and a matter of convention. For Saussure, meaning is made possible by differences among signs within a linguistic system. We can know what a sign means only because it differs from other signs, that is, words obtain their meanings through relations among one another within a particular system. Saussure's assumptions that language as a system operates outside an individual and it is the individual who is "spoken by" language have had profound impacts on the following critical systems of thought and on the development of autofictional subject who is presented as being constantly redefined by language.

In line with the structuralist stance, Jacque Derrida and other poststructuralists maintain that there is nothing outside of the text because for humans everything is mediated by language. However, poststructuralism breaks with structuralism at a crucial point. Derrida significantly posits that there is not an innate relationship between the signifier and the signified, and therefore, language is not so stable as structuralists believed. As Saussure suggested, a signifier differs from other signifiers, but it also defers the meaning it produces because every signifier takes place of the signified in a different context. In Saussure's concept of sign, the signifier is tied inseparably to a single meaning, yet Derrida destabilises this relationship with the postulation that signifiers constantly transform into signifieds. For him, sign and meaning are never identical. A sign can appear in many contexts with different meanings. As a result,

meaning is continually relegated by the signifier, leading to what he calls "différance".[1] That is to say, meaning is both generated by differences among signifiers, and it is deferred in an endless play of signification. The free play of meanings, in which a signifier leads to a signified that becomes a signifier for another signified, undermines the unity and coherence of a text. Given that words carry multiple meanings and traces from related words in other contexts, language cannot be a transparent medium of representation. Language produces meanings that are always elusive and transitory. Being inherently unstable, meanings constantly slide away. Because nothing escapes from language, authenticity and truth become impossible. In this regard, the truth claims of the author of classical autobiography inevitably precipitate the birth of the autofictional "I" that admits offering a kind of truth which is different from its conventional definition. Rather than aiming for an indisputable and universal truth, autofiction acknowledges providing a highly subjective version of truth that can be barely conveyed as the author intends due to polyvalent nature of language.

For Derrida, logocentrism of Western philosophical tradition longs for a transcendental signifier that corresponds to a stable transcendental signified. He notes that Western thought systems are founded on a ground or a first principle which is accepted as the essence, or truth. Poststructuralist view of impossibility of truth yet collides with this desire for a centre. Derrida (1970/2002) defines a centre as a principle that organises a structure and permits a limited play of signification because centre creates boundaries. Centres of meaning temporarily stop the infinite flow of signification. Derrida further points out that first principles are often marked by what they exclude. When there is a centre, there is also something which does not belong to it. Setting up centres, thus, generate hierarchized oppositions in which one concept is privileged over the other. There are plenteous sets of oppositional terms in Western culture, such as good/evil, nature/culture, thought/feeling, pure/impure, same/other, masculine/feminine, and the notorious white/black. One concern raised by oppositional terms is that they are intimately linked to negative stereotyping, repression, discrimination, social injustice and other undesirable practices (Bertens, 2014). Deconstruction intends to dismantle these binary oppositions in order to lay bare that they are not naturally given, or guaranteed by any existing authority. All language systems are fundamentally unreliable cultural constructs; therefore, hierarchies they create can be challenged and changed. By subverting conceptual opposites,

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[1] The French word "différence" homonymously means either difference or deferral. Derrida (1972/1989) has invented the term *différance,* spelt with "a" instead of "e", to signify both difference and deferral simultaneously. He uses the term to refer to his presumption that meaning in a language is produced by a word's difference from other words, and at the same time, it is inevitably postponed through an unending chain of signifiers.

deconstruction democratises language and moves meaning towards undecidability. The Western tendency to create binaries and boundaries is clearly seen in literary categorisation too. Autobiography and novel are strictly set apart from one another, which immediately creates the binary opposition of fact and fiction. Autofiction serves to demonstrate the constructed nature of literary categories by blurring the dividing lines, which renders it as a subversive genre that deconstructs pre-existing conceptions with creation of ambivalence around them.

Deconstruction, rather than setting new centres in the process of subversion, unveils a strange complicity in which oppositional terms become engaged. The existence of a concept is revealed to depend on the existence of another concept. For example, it is argued that without darkness, it would not be possible to recognise the light. Hence, deconstruction assumes that presence of a term is always tainted by an opposite one. The idea of purity of a concept or transcendental meaning is nothing but a fiction. The two terms in any set of opposites are defined by each other, which points to the structuralist and poststructuralist presumption that meaning depends on difference. In like manner, autofiction aims to illustrate the inseparable links that bind fact and fiction together. In autofiction, the imaginary appears at times as more real than the factual, and the referential is always constituted by some elements of fiction. It contests the 'purity' of literary genres with a focus on possibilities that lay outside conventional thought.

Derrida contends further that any linguistic system is subject to *différance* because of countless connotations words have. Deconstruction draws attention to the ambivalence around words and discrepancies between meanings and intended messages as a result of the differences at play within a language. It argues that multiplicity of meanings contained in words lead to a proliferation of interpretations, and none of which can be ever considered as more valid than the others. In this regard, deconstruction disarticulates traditional understandings about the author and the work. The work now becomes the text, the conventional notions of stable meaning and truth are replaced by the unending play of infinite meanings that exceed the author's intentions and control. In this respect, the author of autofiction relies on multiplicity of meanings created by language, not to inscribe a foreknown objective veracity as in traditional autobiography, but to engage with the processes of both discovering and constituting a kind of truth that is neither preconceived nor absolute.

In accordance with Derrida's assertation of the split between the signifier and the signified and free play of meanings within a linguistic system, Paul de Man (1973) points out the unreliability of language as a medium for communicating truths because of its rhetorical and figural dimensions. Figures of speech enable the author to achieve meanings that are different from the literal statement; therefore, they problematise the relationship between words and their

referents. For de Man, all texts have both grammatical and rhetorical structures with separate meanings. Reading a text grammatically produces one meaning, and reading it rhetorically gives another. Every text has at least two possible meanings. Along these lines, autofiction never purports to convey one singular truth. It acknowledges that the moment when embodied experiences are translated into language, alternative "realities" are brought into being as a result of creative potentials of language. Therefore, autofiction is distinguished markedly from autobiography by its capacity to hold a variety of meanings of "facts". Concordantly, Roland Barthes (1970/1974) defines the ideal text as containing instability, plurality and dispersion of meanings, that has "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (p. 5). It is the kind of text which embodies blanks and fragments, permitting "both overlapping and loss of messages" (p. 20). It engages readers and critics to produce infinite number of meanings. In this respect, Barthes (1971/1977) makes a distinction between the work and the text. Unlike the former that intends to communicate a pre-determined meaning, the text does not close on a signified. On the contrary, it offers an endless deferment of meanings with disconnections and variations between the signifier and the signified. Barthes' delineation of the dissimilarity between the two types of writing can be applied to traditional autobiography and autofiction. While autobiography aims to convey a certain singular truth, autofiction permits language to produce unceasingly different versions and possibilities of the factual.

As Barthes (1966/1977) stated earlier, the function of narrative is not to represent, to show or to imitate an external reality. What the text concerns itself with is "language alone, the adventure of language" (p. 124). In his definition of autofiction, Doubrovsky directly refers to Barthes's description of the text. Rather than representing life events, autofictional works as "texts" engage with creative possibilities of language to discover their meanings. According to Barthes (1973/1975), the text transcends all types of boundaries, such as the ones present among social relations (i.e., author, reader and critic) and linguistic relations (i.e., multivalence of signs). *Texte scriptable* explodes literary codes and destabilises the reader's expectations, inviting them to participate actively in the construction of meaning. The writerly text, thus, blurs the distinction between the reader and the author. Besides, the writerly text deviates from the status quo in style and content. It seeks forms of representation that obscure the divisions between the real and the artificial. For Barthes (1971/1977), because traditional literary categories set bounds to the flow of language, the writerly text poses problems of classification. In this regard, autofiction's significant emphasis on figures of speech, unusual writing styles and mixing of genres provide the author with the liberty to experiment with language and to explore the 'reality' outside conventional ways of thinking. It challenges all boundaries in order

to make space for emergence of alternative interpretations of embodied experiences, which can provide insightful perspectives to the authors themselves.

As opposed to the humanistic approach that situates the origin and true meaning of works in the author, poststructuralism posits that the text can be read without the knowledge about the author, who is no longer the origin and owner of his/her work. In his well-known essay "The Death of the Author" (1967/1977), Roland Barthes reduces the authorial position to that of a scriptor. The modern author does not express anything but brings together threads from existing writings, weaving them into a new text. The scriptor, therefore, exists only to produce the work, and not to explicate its intended meanings. For Barthes, the traditional concept of author imposes a limit on the text, ascribing to it a final meaning. By contrast, the scriptor comes into existence with the text and disappears upon completion. The origin of the meaning resides only in language and its influences on the reader. The text does not have a single message that requires to be deciphered. It can be explained only in relation to other texts and subjective responses of readers, that is, the meanings of the text perpetually proliferate rather than being reduced to certain signifieds. Being stripped of the authority over the writing, the author can exist in his/her own text only as a textual element (Barthes, 1971/1997). In "What is an Author?" (1969/1984), Michel Foucault identically targets at the humanist notion of the author which he believes to be an outcome of the "privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas" (p. 101). Like Barthes, he views today's writing as being freed from the restrictions imposed by the authorial authority and textual closure. The text is now conceived as referring to itself without being confined to its interiority, that is, it becomes identified with "its own unfolded exteriority" (p. 102). In other words, the text is seen as an interplay of signs arranged according to the free-floating nature of signifiers rather than its signified content. As a result, the text invariably exceeds its rules and transgresses its limits.

As Barthes declared the death of author, Foucault (1969/1984) asserts that the work holds "the right to kill, to be its author's murderer" (p. 102). Like Barthes, he stresses that the author is no longer the centre of the text but only a part of the narrative structure. The author has to be cancelled out because his/her individuality is as much problematic as the conventional ideas of unity of language and text. For Foucault, a proper name, a signifier that indicates a specific historical figure, does not have a single signification. It oscillates between the two poles of designation and description. While the former refers to the person, the latter refers to the ideas and the work associated with the name. As a signifier, then, the proper name can take on either the signified of the actual person or the signified of the ideas/work. Through what he calls "author-function", one can limit, choose and exclude interpretations. It is a certain functional

principle by which the free circulation of meanings is impeded. In this respect, the author can be considered as an ideological figure that marks the anxiety of proliferation of meaning. Both Barthes and Foucault reduce the author to mere textuality by challenging his/her traditionally privileged position as unique source of meaning. Fictionalising the author partly, autofiction attempts to remove limitations on proliferation of meanings in alignment with the poststructuralist views; however, its preservation of certain factual aspects of the author can be considered as a divergence from the idea of pure textuality. In this regard, the presence of the referential author in autofictional works can be conceived as an effort to restore the authorial authority. Even if authors are not the unique sources of meaning, autofiction emphasizes the value of their perspectives and the way they do and could experience the world.

As poststructuralism deconstructs the traditional views of language, work and author, it problematises the concept of truth that has been thought to be accessible through the words of the writer. Because language is now considered as unstable and multivalent, and the author is a mere construct, poststructuralist critics posit that there is not any form of truth that is reliable. Derrida has interrogated the relationship between language and truth based on the instability and multivalence inherent in language. He maintains that language is not capable of giving us access to truth as logocentrism of the Western philosophy has held. What language can provide is nothing more than signs that are culturally constructed (Derrida, 1967/1976). Derrida accordingly argues that the binary oppositions generated by logocentrism are always defined by power relations. Identically, based on Ferdinand de Saussure's system of signs in which the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrarily established, Barthes (1957/1972) proposes that signs are elevated to the level of myths when they are used as signifiers attached to new signifieds. For him, this secondary level of meanings or connotations added to signs are less arbitrary because they are meant to serve the ideologies of those in power. Far from reflecting reality, Barthes views language as creating myths that help to naturalize particular worldviews. Like Derrida and Barthes, Michel Foucault maintains that there is not any truth outside power. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976-2018), he influentially argues that power, knowledge and the subject are interconnected. Through language, power designates what is acceptable and what is not, and through disciplinary institutions, makes sure that individuals become "subject" to its truths. In fictionalisation of certain parts of the referential, autofiction casts doubt on the concept of truth in line with the poststructuralist claims of the constructedness of any knowledge. On the other hand, the fact that Doubrovsky employs autofictional writing to grasp 'deeper realities' suggests

that a certain type of truth is still possible. Although autofiction acknowledges that language constructs the reality, it can carry meanings of great significance for the writer.

DISCUSSION

According to Marjorie Worthington (2018), autofiction has developed partially from and as a reaction against the modernist ideas of impersonality and universality and the poststructuralist "death of the author" debates. For her, autofiction's continual references to the extratextual person of the author mark an attempt to reassert authorial authority while simultaneously acknowledging the limits of that authority. In accordance with Derrida's contention that meaning is always drawn from outside, from context, autofiction rejects the idea of the text as containing meaning within itself and resuscitates the figure of author. By accentuating the paratext for meaning, autofiction proposes that the link between the author-character and the actual author is undeniable; however, by problematising the representation of the author-character, autofiction recognises that there is always a distinction between the two, resulting from the poststructuralist assumption that the author is not fully in control of language. As a consequence, autofiction both reaffirms the authority of the author, and at once, repudiates it. Furthermore, because it claims to be a novel and yet maintains a certain connection to the extratextual world, autofiction demonstrates both the possibilities and limits of language as a means to represent real-life experiences accurately (Worthington, 2018). The poststructuralist narrative theory holds that to narrativize is inherently to fictionalize. All writing is by its nature merely a representation of reality, not the reality itself. Rendering factual events into a verbal format and a narrative structure necessarily requires the reconstruction, and therefore, fictionalisation of those events. Language and narrative are not transparent modes of representation. Language does not communicate any pre-existing meaning; on the contrary, it produces meaning. Although autofiction recognises the creative capacity of language, it departs from the poststructuralist view of inherent fictionality of all writing. In order to disrupt this position, authors of autofiction intentionally incorporate biographical facts in their narratives, and yet they simultaneously problematise the representation of their referentiality. These authors accept that language falls short in portraying the reality truthfully; however, at the same time, they maintain that what language creates is still connected to the reality of the author's person and his/her life. In this regard, Doubrovsky describes autofiction as a narrative that arranges facts in a certain order, and in the process, strays inevitably from historical accuracy, for putting an event into words brings along the questions of which details to depict and how to depict them. Doubrovsky stresses that autofiction, nevertheless, adhere to narration of strictly

real events, rather than fabricating them, and embraces the creative possibilities inherent in the act of writing. For Doubrovsky, hence, autofiction refers to a verifiably referential text that engages in alterations and inventions as necessitated by the practice of transcribing factual events into textuality. Even though narrativization inescapably fictionalises all writing, autofiction does not deem it as cancelling out completely representation of reality.

Moreover, by constantly crossing over the borders between fiction and nonfiction, autofiction calls into question the constructed nature of literary categories, but it also accentuates that there is a dividing line between these two modes of narration (Worthington, 2018). Requiring readers to shift constantly their reading strategies, autofiction demonstrates that there are decidedly different readerly expectations for fiction and nonfiction. As such, contrary to the poststructuralist assertion of fictionality of all writing, autofiction maintains a distinction between a factual story and a fictional story while simultaneously showing that any demarcation between fact and fiction is a construct that can be easily breached. Autofiction's distrust of conventional literary classifications is evinced in its interrogation of the validity of the autobiographical pact too. By presenting an author-character who shares biographical elements with the real author yet diverges remarkably from the latter, autofiction demonstrates that there is a difference between a textual character and a real person, and autobiography relies upon a narrativization process that is not transparently referential. Autofiction, thus, raises significant questions about the nature of authorship and of reality in narrative that are both in agreement and contradistinction to the poststructuralist theories. It proposes that even though the fallibility of language renders impossible representation of objective truth, not all writing is deprived of authenticity. Autofiction conveys a kind of truth that is highly personal and specific to the author's view of events, for that very reason, truth in autofiction could be argued to be, to some degree, real. As Doubrovsky puts it, fiction can portray a richer version of the reality, or in Tim O'Brien's words (1990/2009), "story-truth is truer sometimes than happening truth" (p. 171).

In the same vein, Hywel Dix (2018) argues that as opposed to Lejeune's autobiographical pact, foregrounding the mediated nature of the content of any narrative in accordance with the poststructuralist position, autofiction concerns itself with the intersection of truth and imagination. In doing so, however, autofiction does not reject the existence of truth entirely. Instead, autofiction claims to convey a kind of truth that exists in order of symbolic meaning, that is subjectively constructed by virtue of being expressed in the form of narrative. In addition, Dix (2017) emphasises that autofiction disavows the notion of absolute truth on the grounds that flawed nature of human memory and influences of emotions prevent textual reconstruction of any actual event. In his autofictional works, Doubrovsky accordingly commits himself to

narrating the truth while also he thematises the dubious nature of truth itself. Problematising thus representation of referentiality, autofiction upholds the poststructuralist view that language and narrative cannot reflect truthfully reality of the external world. As distinct from poststructuralist approach, autofiction embraces meanings of subjectively constructed perceptions of reality. The act of writing in autofiction functions as a means of constructing and exploring what events mean for individuals, rather than reporting what really happened. Unlike poststructuralist negation of truth claims, autofiction recognises importance and relevance of individual accounts of the truth. As the French writer Christiane Chaulet-Achour conceives, the representation of tensions between truth and imagination is the aesthetic aim of autofiction (Jenson, 2018). Rather than creating difficulties, these pressures provide authors of autofiction with opportunities to interrogate the reality and voice their own versions of the truth shaped by lived experiences. For this purpose, as Meg Jenson (2018) points out, autofiction simultaneously highlights and obscures veracity. It presents a narrator that is and is not the author, events that are and are not representative of real life, and voices that are both human and textual. The resulting ambiguity between factuality and fictionality constitutes the essence of autofiction.

As autofiction opposes to any form of writing, like autobiography, that claims a truthful portrayal of external reality, it rejects humanistic representation of the self as a coherent, unified and stable being or consciousness. Recognising the self instead as a shifting, fragmented and unstable entity, autofiction in Doubrovskian sense commits to a sincere exploration and revelation of the psychic truth of subjectivity, drawing largely on psychoanalytic theories as formulated by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Freud's conception of the self is radically at odds with the humanistic view of the subject as autonomous, ruled by reason and morality. For Freud (1899/1999), human mind is far from being a unified whole, divided between the conscious and the unconscious parts. The latter stores many painful memories of the past, particularly of childhood, repressed desires and wishes which continually influence the way one acts, thinks and feels. The contents of the unconscious are revealed in different forms, such as dreams and art, when the censorship of the conscious is relaxed, and always through symbols instead of direct expressions. Freud therefore makes a distinction between the latent content and the manifest content of dreams where the unconscious thoughts are translated into dream images. Through psychoanalytic techniques including dream analysis and talking cure, Freudian psychoanalysis attempts to identify unresolved conflicts hidden in the unconscious mind. Comparing to the dream-work, Freud regards a work of literature as the external expression of the author's unconscious mind, and suggests that psychoanalytic techniques can

be applied to the text to unveil the author's repressed thoughts and feelings. Accordingly, autofiction in Doubrovskian sense relaxes the constrains imposed by conventional ways of narration, creating a dream-like state for the unconscious thoughts to come up to the surface on the page. That way, autofictional writing practice allows the author to examine psychoanalytically his/her past experiences, particularly childhood memories, which leads Doubrovsky to define autofiction as functioning like a writing cure.

Like Freud, Jacque Lacan (1973/1998) views the subject as decentred and fragmented. Based on Freud's Oedipal model of psychosexual development, Lacan proposes a developmental scheme for human beings, by which he explains how individuals come to perceive themselves as unified wholes despite being, in effect, defined by a "lack".[2] According to his model of maturation, at the *imaginary* stage, the pre-Oedipal infant cannot yet speak, it is subject to impressions and fantasies, urged by drives and desires, and does not have any sense of boundaries and limitations. It has an organic continuity with the mother and the world with no sense of distinction. At the *mirror* stage, children think they see themselves as an entire being, an individuated person, disconnected from the oceanic unity of the maternal body. For Lacan, such recognition of wholeness is a "misrecognition". The mirror stage is thus marked by a discord between the integrated image in the mirror and the reality of the child's uncoordinated body image. Ultimately, the child ascends to the *symbolic* order where he acquires the language and discourse of the Other.[3] This big Other exists outside us and does not belong to us. It provides subject positions from which one may speak, but it does not allow to express definitively one's desires and wishes as they do not quite fit the signifiers of language. As a result, a gap opens between human as an organism and the signifying subject. In submitting to language and accepting 'reality', we lose the original feeling of wholeness. We live ever after with a lack. Lacan argues that what is lost here is *the real* which is different from reality. Reality is constituted by language and culture while the real is the domain outside signification which we do not have an access to because it does not have any signifiers in the world of names we inhabit. For Lacan, the unconscious comes into being as the result of the imposition of the symbolic order on the real of the subject. Rather than representing the 'reality', Doubrovsky aims in autofiction to engage with the 'real', unconscious contents of mind. Transgressing man-constructed boundaries and limitations, he attempts to go back to the real in the imaginary stage.

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[2] Specifically, the lack is an outcome of the child's separation from the mother. More generally, human subjects experience the lack upon entering necessarily in the pre-existing symbolic order that they cannot control (Barker & Jane, 2016, p. 111).

[3] Lacan uses a capital O to make a distinction between the Otherness of language and culture and the otherness of other people (Belsey, 2002, p. 58).

During the process of narration, however, he acknowledges that the language of the Other falls short in expressing fully what is repressed by the symbolic order.

Upon entering in the domain of language, like Saussure, Lacan views human beings as being caught in a system of signs, in a symbolic world. Meaning and subjectivity are generated relationally along a network of differences. However, he disagrees that language is stable, that is, there is one-to-one correspondence between words and objects. For Lacan, language is chiefly figurative, and always fails to express one's desires in that the signifier and signified are never united. There remains a perpetual gap between utterance and its enunciation. Because meaning is always displaced, truth is rendered impossible to utter. The signifying chain can mean something different from what is intended. Lacan's poststructuralist revision of Freud in the light of Saussure's structural linguistics proposes that the unconscious functions like a language (Lacan, 1957/2006). Analogous to language, the unconscious is a site of signification, defined by the mechanisms of condensation and displacement that correspond to the linguistic functions of metaphor and metonymy.[4] Dream images can be taken as signifiers that are always elusive because of the perpetual barrier between the signifier and signified. Both language and the unconscious are characterised by constant deferral of meaning. Lacan (1956/2006) accordingly draws attention to the rhetorical nature of the "talking cure" in psychoanalysis, that is distinguished by tropes and figures of speech, which illustrates the close affinity between the structures of the unconscious and language. In this respect, Doubrovsky reasons figurative capacity of language to mirror the unconscious part of mind in that both are patterned in the same way. However, for him, the act of narration and unconscious thoughts are identically elusive, unable to reveal a whole picture of the self and life.

In line with psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories, Doubrovsky recognises the human subject as being "broken into pieces", and that the self is largely inaccessible because of the veiled unconscious part of human psyche and nonrepresentational nature of language (Célestin, 2001). Being informed and inspired by the works of Freud and Lacan, Doubrovsky approaches the subject as a fissured and occult entity that is debarred from the knowledge of repressed thoughts and feelings constituting part of the truth about one's being. Autofiction emerges from this impossibility of grasping the self in complete transparency. Autofiction hence undermines the foundations of autobiography by putting in question the idea of theological and coherent

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[4] Lacan draws on Roman Jacobson's analysis of the two poles of languages; metaphor and metonymy in his essay "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles" (1956). In metaphor, a signifier substitutes for another signifier in an attempt to articulate what cannot be expressed, the signified while in metonymy, a signifier is replaced by another that is closely associated with it. Both function by signifying something other than they claim.

development of the subject's identity and unproblematic transcription of external or psychic reality into words. Although the Freudian position assumes that psychoanalytic techniques such as talking cure and dream analysis may help to uncover the hidden contents of the unconscious, and provide illuminating insights into the nature of one's subjectivity, Lacan's poststructuralist reinterpretation complicates the notion of truth about the self by laying emphasis on the function of language as not representing subjectivity but constituting it. Autofiction in Doubrovskian sense accordingly proposes that writing can function as a writing cure, allowing one to explore, to some extent, the contents of the unconscious. At the same time, it acknowledges that because the real needs to be transformed into the symbolic, the meaning language provides always remains a prophecy (Gronemann, 2019).

Despite failing to represent authentically, language exists as the only medium for inquiring into the unconscious. Through writing, the author of autofiction discovers something that is connected to his/her personality and life, and also constitutes constantly his/her subjectivity, which permits exploration of the possibilities of him/herself. For the authors of autofiction, the only "truthful" way of representing the self is a fragmentary writing which imitates the structure of the unconscious. As Doubrovsky talks about narrating the truth of his subjectivity, he adopts the Freudian notion of allowing the unconscious to emerge from the gaps that open when the control of the conscious mind is temporarily suspended. Foregrounding figurative aspects of language, he employs a spontaneous and associative style of writing regardless of syntax, punctuation and structural coherence. By that means, he seeks to "give initiative to words", that is, he steps back from the authorial control over language to allow it to reveal something new about himself (Hunt, 2018). Fictionality of his writing, on the other hand, rises from the symbolic function of language in the process of translating lived experiences into a text. The author is aware that he/she cannot portray truthfully a life in narrative, but can endlessly produce subjectivity through language. As a result, writing becomes a part of the author's existence which language operates not to reflect but to create.

Like poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theories, postmodernist thoughts have contributed significantly to the development of autofiction. Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979/1984), attempts to define postmodernism by calling attention to a change in the status of knowledge in the postmodern era. In modern times, he notes that a number of "grands récits" (grand narratives) provided Western societies with clear meaning systems that helped to establish norms and beliefs and to organise societal activities. Since the 1950s, however, the predominance of these totalising, closed systems of reasoning have diminished as they have been exposed as fictions. As a result, the postmodern world has become dominated

by "an incredulity towards meta-narratives" (p. xxiv). Scepticism has replaced idealistic notions such as scientific advancement, technological development, human progress and universal truths. In place of grand narratives, multitudes of equally weighted "local" narratives have emerged, which have often conflicted with each other, leading to incommensurability and undecidability.

Lyotard's proposition of the collapse of grand narratives that give stable meanings to society is considered as a fundamental principle of postmodern theory, from which many of the other characteristics of the postmodern ensue (Jones, 2007). Because postmodern societies are no longer held together by collective designs and coherent doctrines, they are increasingly prevailed by heterogeneity and diversity. "Fragmentation", "plurality", "difference" and "change" invariably characterise all aspects of the postmodern world that is decentred and structured with complex networks of relations rather than conventional hierarchies. In line with the negation of singular and universal truths, postmodernism undermines the humanist view of individual identity as unified, stable and coherent. Subjectivity is understood as shifting, fragmentary and "in-process", that is, the self is never a singular, fixed and finished phenomenon. While identity was traditionally held to be constituted by an irreducible essence, postmodern perception foregrounds the influences of social and historical circumstances on formation of individuality, and opens up the possibility for a fluid understanding of identity. As such, postmodernism recognises individual to be complex, plural and unstable rather than being grounded in an unchanging essence.

At both individual and social levels, the breakdown of unifying meta-narratives and their replacement by fragmentation and plurality bring along feelings of disorientation and confusion, which are emblematic of the postmodern world (Jones, 2007). Space in postmodernism is accordingly characterised by loss of a unified plan, discontinuity and constant border crossings. The blurring of spatial boundaries undermines the conventional view of nations as being clearly demarcated and containing distinct peoples with "pure" cultures. Accentuating the porosity of boundaries, postmodernism embraces cultural mixing, heterogeneity and multiplicity of histories and cultures.

In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981/1994), Jean Baudrillard influentially associates postmodernity with a crisis in how we represent and understand the world. For Baudrillard, the conflicts and dilemmas created by the postmodern condition are both real and "hyperreal".[5] They are real to the individuals who have been involved, and yet, at the same time, unreal

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[5] Jean Baudrillard (1981/1994) defines "hyperreal" as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (p. 1). It is a representation or a sign without an original referent.

because in the postmodern age, there no longer exists a distinction between reality and its representation. It is often the latter that precedes and determines the real. Therefore, Baudrillard stresses that reality at some point becomes unreal, a simulation. The real and fiction are blended together, rendering it impossible to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. The boundaries between facts/history and fiction are problematised. Correspondingly, Linda Hutcheon (2006) identifies the postmodern art as being characterised by the blurring of the boundaries between established genres, popular and high art, mass and elite cultures. She emphasises that this mixing of elements from distinct categories of culture creates a state of "in-betweenness". The ensuing formal and thematic hybridity challenges notions of homogeneity and uniformity in art and theory.

As Elizabeth H. Jones discusses in *Spaces of Belonging* (2009), there are a number of affinities between autofiction and postmodernism. The breakdown of grand narratives and overarching belief systems, as Lyotard suggested, has led to the questioning of traditionally stable elements of life writing, such as history, truth and subjectivity. Autofiction destabilises such conceptions by creating uncertainty around them, mixing the referential with the fictional. In line with postmodernism's defiance of dominant systems of thought, autofiction problematises Lejeune's totalising formulation of autobiography through transgressive tendencies, playful crossings of the boundaries between fact and fiction, between autobiography and novel, and emphasis on gaps and inconsistencies in autobiographical writing. Moreover, autofiction challenges the traditional assumption that referential writing necessarily excludes aesthetic beauty and literary merit, through stylistic experimentation, which is a typical feature of postmodernism. Besides, Jones notes that postmodernism has contributed to the denaturalization of the white, heterosexual male "ideal" subject of autobiography, which is reflected in autofiction's openness to the stories of people previously excluded from classical autobiographical writing.

Postmodernism challenges the modernist assumption that art and life are separate realms. In that regard, autofiction provides a literary arena where some of the crucial questions from life such as "identity" and "belonging" are discussed (Jones, 2009). Rather than giving an account of a pre-existing objective truth, autofictional mode of writing concerns itself with exploring not only the external reality but also the aspects of life that remain outside the conscious part of mind. Furthermore, just as postmodernism foregrounds multiplication of meaning, autofiction is preoccupied with fragmentation and plurality. Grasping the subject in fragments and employing a complex style of writing with discontinuities and digressions, autofiction typically conveys a fissured and partial picture of a life story rather than totalising and explaining it fully. As postmodernism refuses the notion of singular and coherent selfhood,

autofiction challenges the stability of the narrator's identity, evincing adherence to the postmodern view of plural and shifting subjectivity. Autofiction accordingly presents the author-character as negotiating boundaries between past and present selves, past and present lived experiences.

Finally, postmodernism is characterised by the disavowal of the concepts of unity and homogeneity, which autofiction identically challenges through hybridity of the referential and fictional modes of narration. Although autofiction employs amply postmodernist techniques, according to Myra Bloom (2019), as distinct from postmodernism that aims to destabilise the subject and the mimetic abilities of narrative, autofiction uses these techniques in order to capture better the complexity of the subject's psychic and physical worlds. In contrast to the postmodernist focus on irony, autofiction emphasises sincerity of the author and a renewed faith in the possibilities of personhood. Similarly, Ferreira-Meyers (2018) remarks that autofiction blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction not for the sake of invention but in an attempt to reflect the world with justice, which is to say that autofiction aims to communicate a certain kind of truth.

CONCLUSION

Having scrutinised the critical catalysts that have led to the emergence of autofictional mode of writing, it is concluded that the genre maintains a dialectical relationship with the twentieth century critical theories. Poststructuralism's emphasis on the instability of relations between signifier and signified in a linguistic sign, between word and meaning, calls in question the reliability of language to represent the referential world and convey the author's intentions unproblematically. Poststructuralist assumption of language as providing merely signs that are culturally constructed, and contemplation of any narrative as a product of free-floating play of signifiers destabilise the traditional position of the author as the unique source of meaning and cast doubt on the possibility of objective and universal truth. Both as a consequence and a reaction, autofiction concurrently affirms and questions the poststructuralist dismantling of the conventional perspectives on the concepts of authority, authenticity and truth by bringing the authorial presence back to the text but fictionalising it to some extent, committing to narrate the truth but creating an ambivalence around it. Autofiction engages both with the potentials and limits of language in representing the referential world. Autofiction accepts that language fails to portray the reality truthfully; however, at the same time, it holds what language creates to be still connected to the reality of the author. Autofiction's contention of the possibility of a certain kind of truth depends heavily on psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

It is observed that although autofiction assumes the subject to be fractured by the unconscious and denied access to the whole picture of the self's reality, little pieces of information that are recovered through psychoanalytic processes in autofictional narration provide truthful insights into the author's selfhood and create opportunities to conceive subjective versions of reality. Through relaxation of the constrains imposed by conventional narrative forms, autofiction creates textually dream-like states to engage with the unconscious contents of the mind. Maintaining language to be patterned in identical ways with the unconscious, autofiction relies on figures of speech so as to induce the hidden realities of psyche to rise to the surface in narrative. Much as acknowledging the elusive nature of both language and the unconscious and their impotence to provide a complete portrayal of the self's veracity, autofiction strives to uncover the 'truths' that are disguised from the conscious mind through practice of narration. The unveiled knowledge about the subject is deemed as valuable despite all its flimsy and fragmentary constitution. Finally, it is shown that the postmodernist presumption of collapse of grand narratives has paved way to autofiction's preoccupation with subjective histories. As postmodernism foregrounds fragmentation, instability, heterogeneity and multiplication of meaning, autofiction engages with multiple possibilities of the self and life rather than seeking to give a representation of a fixed, coherent, unifying and single truth in regard to the author's personality and the surrounding reality. However, as district from the postmodernist emphasis on irony, autofiction calls attention to sincerity of the author and regenerated confidence in the possibilities of personhood.

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